

EARLY BYZANTINE CAPITALS FROM SARDIS

A Study on the Ionic Impost Type

FIKRET K. YEGÜL

STARTING in 1958, a great deal of effort has been spent by the Harvard-Cornell Archaeological Expedition in uncovering the large Roman bath-gymnasium complex in Sardis.¹ The plan of this large bath building, recognizable as the "large imperial type," consists of a number of rooms and halls arranged symmetrically around an east-west axis (fig. 1). Almost the entire eastern half of the complex, which occupies an area of about five and one-half acres, is taken up by an open colonnaded court entered on the east through a central gate. Directly opposite the central gate, the marble court, a vestibule with multi-storied façades of marble architecture, opens into the palaestra. On the north and south, it is bounded by a number of rooms which are believed to have been related to the palaestra, such as rooms for exercise and community use. Sometime during the third century A.D., the rooms on the south side were given over to the Jewish community of the city and entirely rebuilt as a monumental synagogue.

Archaeological evidence indicates a mid-second-century date for the original construction of the complex. Subsequent renovations must have been frequent during its long history. Of these, an early third- and a late fifth-century reconstruction and redecoration of the marble court and perhaps of the entire eastern half of the complex are

especially prominent. It is known that the building was in use into the late sixth century; it seems to have fallen into total neglect and decay after the Sassanian invasion of Sardis in A.D. 616.

Among the most interesting architectural finds in Sardis belonging to the Byzantine period are the Ionic impost capitals excavated inside the southeast and southwest corners of the palaestra and consequently associated with the colonnade order at least sometime during the numerous renovations of the building. We have six completely or partially preserved capitals and seven smaller-sized fragments² (figs. 5–15). These constitute, by a conservative estimate, nine or ten different capitals of which two are designed especially to fit the inside corners of the colonnade. It is, in fact, possible to suggest an arrangement with Ionic impost capitals occupying the southeast and southwest corners of the palaestra and two more on either side of them (figs. 1, 2).

Many of the plain, white marble shafts of the palaestra columns were found very near the capitals they have been connected with, lying directly on the mosaic floor, except for a layer of debris about twenty centimeters thick, and covered by more of the fallen north wall of the synagogue (fig. 3). No trace of a masonry arcade was ever found, although the entire palaestra was cleared down to its pavement. Originally, all of these columns must have carried Corinthian capitals; that most retained these capitals into the sixth century is attested by many full and fragmentary ones found scattered over the south and east palaestra colonnades. The

¹ Annual preliminary reports by George M. A. Hanfmann of the Sardis excavations have been published in *BASOR* (= *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research in Jerusalem*) since 1959 and are referred to herein by fascicle number, year of publication, and page number. I should like to express my thanks to Professor Hanfmann, who has made the Sardis material available to me and has guided my study in all its stages. I also remember fondly the many friends in Sardis and at the Fogg Art Museum whose concerns for the capitals made work easier and more inspiring for me.

² *BASOR*, 182 (1966), 38, fig. 30. Capitals (Syn 139 and Syn 115) were excavated in 1962. One of the corner capitals (Syn 138) came to light in 1965. Three more Ionic impost capitals were found in 1971: PA/W 71.01, PA/S 71.10, and PA/W 71.07, another corner capital. For the description, see page 272f.

use of impost capitals carrying a flat entablature (instead of an archivolt) is most unusual and somewhat contradictory to the purpose; it might be explained by the fact that the impost capitals were only a few replacement elements of a renovation scheme which by and large still retained the earlier form of the vast palaestra order (the total number of capitals replaced is estimated to be eight or ten of the total one hundred).

Aside from their intrinsic value as well preserved examples of late antique architectural ornament from Asia Minor, the capitals are significant to our understanding of the history of the bath-gymnasium complex and could be helpful in dating one or more of its complicated building phases. It should be realized, however, that our knowledge of Ionic impost capitals is restricted, while only very few of the examples known to us are securely datable.³ It is hoped that the following questions will help to unfold the primary objectives of this study: (1) What are the unique and special characteristics of the Sardis capitals? (2) Where do these capitals fit into the general scheme of development of the Ionic impost type? (3) What is the achievement and precise contribution of the Sardis capitals to the broader subject of the art of late antique and Byzantine Asia Minor?

The Ionic impost capitals of Sardis are divided into two distinct zones: a lower Ionic zone with volutes and echinus between them and an upper trapezoidal impost with straight sides crowned by a heavily profiled abacus. Three basic ornamental motifs, all derived from the classical repertory, have been employed in their decoration: (1) the acanthus leaf and its stylized combinations on the impost of the "volute side," on the echinus and on the bolster of the Ionic volute; (2) the fluting (cavetto) on the impost

of the "pulvinus side"; (3) the "open-and-closed" palmettes (palmette-and-anthemion) on the imposts of the corner capitals (fig. 4).

At first glance, the trapezoidal impost surface appears to be covered with a free pattern of acanthus leaves. More careful observation, however, reveals how formalized and symmetrical this ornamental work is. Although the rendering of the acanthus decoration is flat, the leaves are strongly emphasized and "structured" by heavy V-shaped grooves running through their middle.

In terms of volumetric arrangement and simple decorative choice, the Sardis capitals share many of the characteristics of the Ionic impost type, distributed over the Byzantine East Mediterranean. There are, however, a number of unique and unusual features displayed by these capitals that attract our attention and demand unhurried consideration.

First, the use of special, L-shaped capitals for interior corners: this interesting and effective solution of the corner is unique among the capitals of the Ionic impost type. It also suggests that the capitals were not brought from another building but made precisely for that location and for that use (fig. 15).

Second, the lack of crosses or imperial monograms on the impost block: the Sardis capitals are among the few that do not have crosses; in fact, together with some of the capitals from the Sea Palace in Constantinople, they constitute one of the rare occasions where Ionic impost capitals have been used in a secular building.

Third, the heavy profiling of the abacus: most capitals of this type are terminated by a plain fillet above the impost zone. The heavily profiled, projecting abacus of the Sardis examples looks like a third element, almost like a third zone, on top of the impost—perhaps a much simplified but still recognizable cornice.

Fourth, the application of fluting to the entire pulvinus side of the impost: although the use of the classical cavetto is not particularly striking or unusual in itself, it is the only instance encountered in this study where the entire side of the impost—instead of only the middle—is consistently occupied by it.

³ The most complete study of Byzantine capitals is still the remarkable work of Rudolf Kautzsch—*Kapitellstudien* (Berlin, 1936), 165–82. This major and painstaking collection and classification of capitals unfortunately does not benefit from the large amount of new material that has been discovered in the last thirty-eight years. A later work in related fields: F. W. Deichmann, "Studien zur Architektur Konstantinopels," *Deutsche Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft*, 4 (1957), 41–49.

Finally, the use of the "open-and-closed" palmette decoration: the use of this prominent classical motif on one of the corner capitals (Syn 138) is to my knowledge unprecedented in the decoration of Ionic impost capitals (figs. 7, 14).⁴

At this point, one might ask whether a recognizable pattern of development exists for the Ionic impost capital and where and how the Sardis examples fit into this general scheme. The shaping of the Ionic impost capital as a type is directly linked to the introduction of a separate impost block over the classical capital to provide a greater support area for the springing ends of an arcade.⁵ It is interesting to note that neither the arcade of the forum in Lepcis Magna nor the peristyle of Diocletian's palace in Spalato carry imposts. The type was properly intro-

duced with the fusion of the classical Ionic capital to the Byzantine impost block, possibly very late in the fourth century. In this form, the capital won great popularity in the Eastern Mediterranean regions in the fifth and sixth centuries; its use in the West is rare and sporadic. It became less frequent after the era of Justinian and there are very few examples known to us after the sixth century.⁶

The earliest known example of the Ionic impost capital is from Skripu, in Greece, and is probably not later than A.D. 400 (fig. 16). Two capitals in the Alexandria Museum are strongly believed to be within the first quarter of the fifth century, and probably of local production (fig. 17).⁷ Three examples from Greece which are commonly assigned to the first half of the fifth century are the capitals from Chalkis,⁸ Daphnousion,⁹ and Delphi¹⁰ (figs. 18, 19, 20).

These earlier capitals belonging to the first half of the fifth century clearly retain the identity of two zones: the Ionic and the impost. The lower Ionic zone exists as a fully identifiable Ionic capital with large volutes, often projecting under the heavy and blocky impost which is plain and unornamented, except for a cross or a monogram framed by a medallion.

The earliest known examples from Constantinople are the mid-fifth-century capitals from the atrium of the church of St. John of Studion¹¹ (fig. 21). The corners of the

⁴ With perhaps the exception of a Corinthian pier capital, found by Cyril Mango, from a church in Kurşunlu, near Bandırma, Bithynia (mentioned but not illustrated in Mango, "The Monastery of St. Abercius at Kurşunlu [Elegmi] in Bithynia," *DOP*, 22 [1968], 170-71). This elaborate and very fine capital, crowned by a row of palmette-and-anthemion, egg-and-bar, and cyma reversa, was brought to my attention through the kindness of Dr. Nezih Firath of the Istanbul Archaeological Museum (fig. 33). Dr. Firath, a long-standing authority on the excavations in and around Istanbul, states in a letter to me (November 5, 1971) that he has not seen the classical palmette decoration used on Ionic impost capitals anywhere. Other uses of this rare ornamental motif in Byzantine art noted by O. M. Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology* (Oxford, 1911), 685-713.

⁵ An early example of an Ionic capital carrying a separate impost block in the Basilica in Glyphada is cited by Kautzsch, *op. cit.*, 166. A later occurrence of separate imposts are the capitals from the early fifth-century (?) basilica in Daphnousion (Arkitsa); see A. C. Orlandos, "Une Basilique paleochrétienne en Locride," *Byzantion*, 5 (1929), 219, fig. 71. In his article, "On the Interpretation of Stylistic Changes in Late Antique Art," *Bucknell Review*, XV, no. 3 (1967), 3-4, figs. 2, 3, 4, Ernst Kitzinger gives a lucid synoptic view of the phenomenon of stylistic development applied to three select examples of Ionic impost capitals dating between the very early fifth century and ca. A.D. 532. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Prof. Kitzinger, who has so generously made his collection of comparative material available and supplied me with constant invaluable advice.

⁶ The origins of the impost are not very clear, though it seems definitely to be post-Constantinian; Deichmann, *op. cit.*, 41-45. Dalton suggests the east and Syria as the probable home of the impost block, invented when the archivolt succeeded the architrave. He cites as an example the Praetorium at Musmieh (C. J. M. De Vogüé, *Syrie centrale, Architecture civile et religieuse du I^{er} au VII^e siècle*, 1 [Paris, 1865], pl. 7); Dalton, *op. cit.*, 174-75. For the use of the impost in the West in the fifth century, see J. Laurent, "Delphes Chrétien," *BCH*, (1899), 214.

⁷ Kautzsch, *op. cit.*, 166, figs. 535, 536; Deichmann, *op. cit.*, 47.

⁸ W. von Alten, *Geschichte des altchristlichen Kapitells* (Munich, n.d.), 39, 40; J. Strzygowski, "Die Akropolis in altbyzantinischer Zeit," *Athenische Mitteilungen*, 14 (1899), 271-96, fig. 6.

⁹ Orlandos, *op. cit.*, 207, fig. 7.

¹⁰ Laurent, *op. cit.*, 214, fig. 9.

¹¹ Kautzsch, *op. cit.*, 167, fig. 540a and b.

impost are occupied by large acanthus leaves; in the center there is a cross buried well into the foliage. Similar to capitals from St. John of Studion are the two from the nave gallery of Basilica A, in Nea Anchialos, Greece (fig. 22). These are believed to belong to the late fifth century, although the dating of the basilica cannot be strictly verified on an archaeological basis.¹² In this general family one can include the finely carved capitals from St. Leonidas in Corinth-Lechaion, dated *ca.* A.D. 450–60¹³ (fig. 23). A third capital from the same basilica at Nea Anchialos¹⁴ and one of the two capitals recently found in Taşkasap,¹⁵ Istanbul (figs. 24, 25) follow each other in terms of volumetric and ornamental organization, although the examples from Greece are, on the whole, much more rigidly composed.

All of these examples, tentatively placed in the middle to late fifth century, share a close similarity of acanthus ornament which relates them to the Sardis capitals, with the same coarse-leafed, strongly structured plant form growing in triple-leaf lobes from the main stem. Further similarities to the Sardis capitals can be found in at least two of the very interesting pre-Justinianic capitals from Macedonia. These capitals come from the Episcopal Basilica in Stobi,¹⁶ currently again under excavation, whose dating oscillates between early and late fifth

century among the scholars concerned¹⁷ (fig. 26). Their strong, fleshy acanthus leaves with sharply bent, pointed tips grouped in tripartite lobes, flat but vigorous carving, and overall strong pattern display prominent affinities to some of the acanthus ornamentation of Sardis material. Although this should not necessarily suggest a direct connection between Sardis and Stobi, it might favor the presence of some artistic interdependency between the provinces, without the intervention of the capital city.¹⁸

¹⁷ A survey of opinion of the dating of Stobi capitals: Egger: around A.D. 500; Kautzsch: beginning of sixth century; Deichmann: mid-sixth century, Justinianic; Kitzinger: around A.D. 500; Nikolajević-Stojković: early fifth century. Deichmann believes that the Stobi capitals were begun after the decoration of St. Sophia and carved by Macedonian artists trained in Constantinople, *op. cit.*, 48, 49. While Deichmann's dating seems to me much too late, Nikolajević-Stojković's argument for early fifth century appears too early. The capitals definitely are more "advanced" than the early fifth-century work observed within a larger regional scale, including examples from Asia Minor, the East, and Constantinople.

As a result of the firm archaeological evidence that has come up during the last two seasons' work at the Episcopal Basilica, the excavator James Wiseman believes that the early phase of the church is no later than the middle reign of Theodosius I. He has kindly drawn my attention, however, to the possibility that the second phase, which involved some major architectural changes in the building, could be associated with Theodoric's burning of the city in A.D. 479. I would suggest that at least some, if not all, of the ornamental Ionic impost capitals belong to this second phase and hence can be tentatively dated within the last quarter of the fifth century.

¹⁸ Further credence in this assumption can be taken through consideration of the second large group of mid-sixth-century Serbian capitals from Caričin Grad (Nikolajević-Stojković, *op. cit.*, figs. 88, 89, 90–98). This very unusual development of the Ionic impost type is characterized by the reduction of the impost in favor of an exaggerated growth of the Ionic zone, with impressively large volutes. This final merging of the two zones into such an expressive form reminds one of the late capitals from Armenia (Church of St. Gregory, Ani, dated A.D. 1001 [K. Ginhardt, *Das christliche Kapitell zwischen antike und spätgotik*, Beiträge zur vergleichenden Kunstforschung, III (Vienna, 1923), pl. 4, fig. 22]), but more dramatically points out a certain affinity with the simple spiral decorations from contemporary sixth-century

¹² G. A. Sotiriou, "Nea Anchialos," *Archaiologike Ephemeris* (1929), 64, figs. 67, 68; Kautzsch, *op. cit.*, 171.

¹³ R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* (London, 1965), 99–101, pl. 36b.

¹⁴ Sotiriou, *op. cit.*, 65, fig. 70.

¹⁵ N. Firatlı, "Bizans Çağına ait üç Mezarlık Buluntusu," *Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri Yıllığı*, 10 (1961), 37ff., pl. 4, figs. 1, 2.

¹⁶ J. Wiseman and D. Mano-Zissi, "Excavations at Stobi, 1970," *AJA*, 75, no. 4 (1971), 399–401; *idem*, "Excavations at Stobi, 1972," *ibid.*, 77, no. 4 (1973), 397–98; R. F. Hoddinott, *Early Byzantine Churches in Macedonia and Southern Serbia* (New York, 1963), 161–67; I. Nikolajević-Stojković, *La décoration architecturale sculptée l'époque Bas-Romaine en Macédoine, en Serbie et au Monténégro*, Académie serbe des sciences, Monograph 279, Institut d'Etudes Byzantines, No. 5 (Belgrade, 1957), 74–86, figs. 62–71; R. Egger, "Die städtische Kirche von Stobi," *Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts*, 24 (1929), 42–87.

A group of capitals exhibiting strong stylistic similarity comes from northern Greece; they are significant insofar as they display the ornamental richness of the Ionic impost type and the use of the drill to achieve a remarkable, finely-dented pattern, although they indicate a totally different line of development than the Sardis examples. The three well-known representatives of this group are the capitals of the window pillars from Basilica A in Nea Anchialos,¹⁹ from St. Sophia in Salonika,²⁰ and those from the choir of St. Demetrius, also in Salonika²¹ (fig. 30). A capital built into the walls of S. Maria Panachrantos (Fenari Isa Camii) in Constantinople displays strong similarities to the Macedonian group and indicates widespread use of this small, delicate type with "circling" branches of naturalistic ornament.²² All of these capitals mentioned belong in the late fifth to early sixth century, although the type might well have continued into the very late sixth century. The popularity of this type and the extreme eclectic tendencies in the use of ornamentation is illustrated remarkably well by one of the fine Ionic impost capitals from Taşkasap, Istanbul (fig. 27).²³

Central Anatolia (W. Ramsay and G. L. Bell, *The Thousand and One Churches* [London, 1909], fig. 29).

¹⁹ Kautzsch, *op. cit.*, 168, fig. 546; Sotiriou, *op. cit.*, 31, fig. 33.

²⁰ Kautzsch, *op. cit.*, 169, fig. 547; Dalton, *op. cit.*, pl. 10; Ginhart, *op. cit.*, 81.

²¹ Kautzsch, *op. cit.*, 169, 170, figs. 546, 548.

²² Other contemporary examples of this type are from a capital in the Chersonese Museum, Crimea (N. V. Ismailova, "Chapiteau byzantin au Musée de Chersonese," *SemKond*, 1 (Prague, 1927), 121–27, fig. 2a and b) and those from the narthex of St. Mark's in Venice (Laurent, *op. cit.*, 228, fig. 8; M. L. Bréhier, *Etudes sur l'histoire de la sculpture byzantine* [Paris, 1951], pl. 15, fig. 1).

²³ This unpublished capital is one of two found in Taşkasap, now in the garden of the Mosaic Museum in Istanbul. It is an astonishing example in that it combines so many different decorative styles and carving techniques (fig. 27). The pulvinus side displays two acanthus plants on the corners; the right acanthus is of the finely-dented and spikey type; the left acanthus is heavy and coarse-leaved with strong V-grooves. The center has a rough unworked bar flanked by a single fluting on the left and a many-lobed acanthus bunch on the right,

If Constantinople itself does not seem to play a leading role in shaping architectural taste during the fifth century, it is unquestionably there that we witness and document the culmination of the type by clearly datable examples.²⁴ The Justinianic capitals from the Church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus (fig. 28) datable to A.D. 523, leading to the well-known examples from the gallery level of St. Sophia (A.D. 532–37), represent the highest point in the development of the Ionic impost capital (fig. 29).²⁵ Here we have the final fragmentation of the classical acanthus and a total treatment of the impost as a pattern with an equal and controlled distribution of light and shadow over the whole surface. The mass of the capital also seems to have found its final form with small but prominent volutes placed at the corners, under a compact, purely ornamental impost.²⁶

Contemporary with the rich Justinianic type, but in contrast to it, is a group of very simple capitals displaying scarcely any ornamentation. A good example of this type

similar to the acanthus modeling on some of the Nea Anchialos capitals, with lean, wiry, and somewhat shallow leaves (figs. 22, 24). The right half of the pulvinus has a deep and finely-dented cluster of acanthus leaves (or perhaps oak) while the left seems to be a deliberately unfinished version of the same thing, displaying a rough and sketchy pattern. One wonders at, and admires, the carefree eclecticism and simple delight of the artist in making such an exuberant exhibition of his styles—almost a lampoon of the more sober tendencies in current Byzantine ornament.

²⁴ Deichmann, *op. cit.*, 47, 48.

²⁵ Kautzsch, *op. cit.*, 172, 173, figs. 557, 558, 559, 560.

²⁶ Another line of development of the richly ornamented Ionic capitals of the mid-sixth century are the ones decorated with vine scrolls. The best example of this is the pier capital in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul (# 1242) with a magnificent peacock in the center of the impost and vine leaves on both sides; G. Mendel, *Catalogue des sculptures grecques, romaines et byzantines*, III, *Musées impériaux ottoman* (Constantinople, 1914), 466, 467, and figures. Another vine-scroll capital of exquisite workmanship is the one noted by Strzygowski in the Bible House Cistern in Istanbul. Kautzsch, *op. cit.*, 175, fig. 563, 564; J. Strzygowski, "Die byzantinischen Wasserbehälter," *Byzantinische Denkmäler*, 2 (1893), 101 pl. 30, fig. 3b.

from Constantinople are the nave capitals of St. Irene, where ornament is restricted to the pulvinus; the impost is plain except for the cross or the monograms of Justinian and Theodora (fig. 31).²⁷ In Ephesus the nave columns of the Basilica of St. John carry Ionic impost capitals of the same plain type (fig. 32).²⁸ Despite the proximity of the site to Sardis (60 miles), the Ephesus capitals seem to bear no direct relationship to the Sardis ones, except for the use of abacus profiling on some of them; even there the resemblance is not close.

The Ionic impost capitals of the latter part of the sixth century bring nothing essentially new. They tend to repeat the fifth- and early sixth-century ornamental motifs or follow the simple type of St. Irene.

A brief survey of some of the better-known examples of Ionic impost capitals such as I could present here can help to construct scarcely more than a rudimentary outline of the "development" of the type, and perhaps to suggest certain broad but recognizable groupings of "form" and "ornament" which I will attempt to summarize.

The volume of the capital moves noticeably toward a greater fusion of the Ionic and impost zones: the volutes become smaller and more compact; the mass as a whole assumes omni-directionality with the introduction of corner volutes. The impost grows lighter and is eventually absorbed by the positioning of acanthus leaves at the corners, spreading out with gently curving profile.

²⁷ W. S. George, *The Church of Saint Eirene at Constantinople* (London, 1912), pl. 12, fig. 35; A. Milligen, *Byzantine Churches in Constantinople* (Oxford, 1912), 84ff., pl. 23. Other examples of the simple Justinianic type from Constantinople come from the Sea Palace and a great number of them from the various cisterns in the city. Strzygowski mistakenly dated some of these cistern capitals to the ninth and tenth centuries. Almost all the capitals from the cisterns have crosses on the impost and most likely are reused pieces originally belonging to minor city churches. Many of these rather coarse, possibly late-sixth-century capitals are exhibited in the garden of the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul.

²⁸ F. Miltner, *Ephesos, Stadt der Artemis und des Johannes* (Vienna, 1958), 119–22, figs. 106a and b, 108, 110; Kautzsch, *op. cit.*, 177, 178, figs. 566a–g, 567a–e.

The predominant ornamental device, the acanthus foliage, moves from a heavy and coarse pattern with strongly structured and sharply bent leaves—used quite interchangeably with a finely-dented and drilled swirling acanthus ornament—to the *à jour* work of the St. Sophia capitals, subjugating the individual element to a uniform surface pattern of stylized decoration.

It will be worthwhile, at this point, to go back to the Sardis capitals and relate them to the general scheme of development outlined for the type (figs. 5–15).

The volumetric form retains an early quality with its stiff and blocky impost, sharply discernible from the Ionic zone below. The Ionic zone, however, has lost its "classical" look with its compressed volutes under the trapezoidal block. The capitals have a definite "directional" quality which is accentuated by the employment of totally different ornamental motifs on different sides—and the lack of acanthus leaves at the corners. The volume approximates the massing of the Hagia Paraskevi capital (fig. 18), or some of the Stobi ones (fig. 26), both of which could be assigned somewhere around the middle of the fifth century.²⁹

The ornament of the Sardis capitals, on the other hand, belongs to the type having coarsely-dented acanthus leaves with a strong V-groove structuring of the plant; but there is also a tendency to treat the surface as a flat plane of leaf pattern against a background of shadowed recesses (figs. 10, 12). In no instance does the acanthus try to imitate naturalistic models closely—the organic life is represented by an artificial plant form growing in disciplined uniformity. Yet, the identity of the plant is recognizable and, in a sense, still conventional. It is more the stylized representation of ornament and flatness of carving than its total transforma-

²⁹ The corner capital (Syn 138) (figs. 14, 15), on the other hand, displays a more refined and lighter proportioning of masses; it has, in fact, corner volutes which appear to be a feature of not earlier than the second half of the fifth century. The changing overall heights of the capitals, which considerably affect their massing, seem to have been the means employed to fit the different column heights of the colonnade order (fig. 4).

tion that creates the "pattern" effect and the illusion of nondescript form. It seems that the acanthus work of the Sardis capitals stands midway between the classical prototypes of the motif and its Justinianic metamorphosis on the capitals of St. Sophia.

Archaeological evidence indicates that one of the major reconstructions of the marble court and the eastern quarters of the gymnasium might have taken place sometime within the last quarter or the last third of the fifth century.³⁰ This might well have been the occasion which prompted the manufacture of a number of Ionic impost capitals as replacements for a redesigned palaestra order.

Taken as a whole, or isolated into its components, the Ionic impost capitals from Sardis conform well to the ornamental tendencies of Byzantine art during the fifth and sixth centuries. They exhibit the family characteristics of at least one predominant current of taste in architectural ornament common to the Balkans, Greece, and Asia Minor. Yet, laid over this clear pattern, they display a number of novel features that are rare and even unique among the known examples of Ionic impost capitals.

Most of these features—like the L-shaped design for corner capitals, the heavy profiling of the abacus, or the use of open-and-closed palmettes—can be traced back directly to their classical and Hellenistic models and explained in terms of the loyalty of the artistic tradition of Asia Minor to its Hellenistic past.³¹ Yet a closer and more immediate source can be hinted at by recalling that up until the Sassanian invasion in A.D. 616

many of the major buildings of Sardis, including the monumental bath complex to which the capitals belong, were still standing and possibly still in use. At the risk of over-emphasizing local influence in the shaping of the Sardis capitals, the importance of possessing so vast a storehouse of architectural decoration—the bath complex, in particular—for the early Byzantine artists and craftsmen, regardless of whether they were native to the region or not, ought to be mentioned. The presence of the imperial bath-gymnasium of Sardis as a major architectural and social institution generating artistic inspiration even as late as the fifth century is, indeed, impossible to overlook. It remains to compare these particular features to verify the nature and the extent of this linkage.

The Ionic capitals of the corner columns of the Synagogue forecourt exhibit the same L-shaped (heart-shaped) design used in at least two of the Ionic impost capitals found (figs. 34 and 34a). The "open and closed palmette" motif is commonly employed to decorate the cornice sima of the second story of the marble court as well as the main order of the palaestra (figs. 35 and 35a). The volutes of the Byzantine capitals with their concave surfaces and sharp filleted edges are almost identical with the volutes of the gate capitals from the marble court (figs. 36 and 36a). The model for the fluting (cavetto) decoration, on the other hand, comes from the architrave frieze of the palaestra order (figs. 37 and 37a).³² It is instructive to note that both in design (L-shaped corner capital) and in decoration (use of "open and closed palmettes"), the Ionic impost capitals from Sardis exhibit features that are extremely rare if not actually unique, and that both of these features were in common usage in the same architectural complex to which the impost capitals belonged at a later date.

³² Some of the late-third-century ornament of the Roman building (like the fluting frieze and the palmette decoration of the palaestra cornice) are inferior in quality to the Byzantine capitals. It is understandable that the artists would want to echo the ornamental motifs of the palaestra entablature on the capitals which were to carry it—and in their effort to emulate, they surpassed the original.

³⁰ The Byzantine inscription, from the podium in the marble court, which celebrates the restoration as a great work, has been tentatively dated to the latter part of the fifth century A.D. (*BASOR*, 162, p. 43). A coin of Zeno (A.D. 475–91) was found on the mosaic floor, under the *opus sectile* marble pavement of the renovation: this sets a fixed earlier date for at least the repairing of the floor, i.e., A.D. 475. It is possible that the restoration activity in the palaestra, to which the capitals belong, is somewhat earlier or later than the reflooring of the marble court and the rooms north and south of it. *BASOR*, 182 (1966), 31; 174 (1964), 28.

³¹ E. Kitzinger, "The Hellenistic Heritage in Byzantine Art," *DOP*, 17 (1963), 95–115.

There is no question that Constantinople was the cultural and artistic center of the Empire,³³ but one cannot be sure how much the development of the known types depended on the capital city. Neither can one precisely establish whether the role played by Constantinople was one of an "innovator" or a "perfector" of these ornamental forms. It becomes increasingly plausible, however, to accept the latter.³⁴ Outside the direct line of influence of the capital city, Sardis uses a type of ornamentation in connection with local revival of earlier forms and conforms to the general characteristic of late Roman work from most sites in Greece and Asia Minor. It is in these general characteristics and in the particular innovations that one can trace the double-parentage of the Sardis capitals and view them as modest but lucid examples of the attempt to harmonize Byzantine aesthetics with Asiatic tradition.

DESCRIPTION OF CAPITALS

(for comparative dimensions, see chart on page 274)

SYN 139 (figs. 8, 9)

The capital is preserved intact except for a 10–15 cm.-wide section of the impost corner of one side. The other side has a diagonal cut across the impost down to the oculus of the right volute. The bottom of the capital is raised 3–3.5 cm. as a circular disc below the Ionic zone. A square dowel hole 4 cm. wide and 8 cm. deep is in the center of the bottom disc.

The volutes have smooth concave surfaces and sharp, ribbon-like edges. They are not connected by a continuous channel (*canalis*) as are classical volutes. The well-known motif of the *canalis* with its sagging listel below the abacus

³³ Deichmann, *op. cit.*, 47, 48.

³⁴ To quote A. Grabar in *The Golden Age of Justinian* (New York, 1967), 71: "Excavations carried out at Ephesus, Philippi, Constantinople and elsewhere have demonstrated that the origins of Byzantine Architecture, whose seminal center from the fourth century on was Constantinople, may be traced to a tradition current in and peculiar to the Aegean region."

is only approximated here by an oval disc, drooping like a "lip" between the volutes. The "lip" has a filletted edge, to which the central acanthus branch of the echinus joins.

The echinus between the Ionic volutes, as well as the entire pulvinus, is decorated by acanthus foliage. The pulvinus (bolster) is divided in the middle by a triple rope, or a band with two banks of acanthus leaflets emerging from it on either side. The leaflets point outward and are separated from each other sharply by a single rope.

The abacus is heavy and strongly profiled. It is composed of an upper fillet and a generous S-curve molding (cavetto and ovolo) which bulges out at the bottom, and recedes back to a thin fillet below.

On the volute side of the impost, a central acanthus leaf grows upward from a single stem, then curls sharply to the sides in two lobes. Leaf groupings branch out from either side of the fan-shaped central plant, one curving downward, the other upward, almost making an S-curve tendril. The corners of the impost are occupied by half acanthus leaves of three lobes each, the tips of their leaves touching the extensions of the central one.

The decoration on the pulvinus side consists of a row of softly outlined flutings (cavetti) which fill the entire area except at the corners, where simple elongated leaves with pointed tips replace the cavetti.

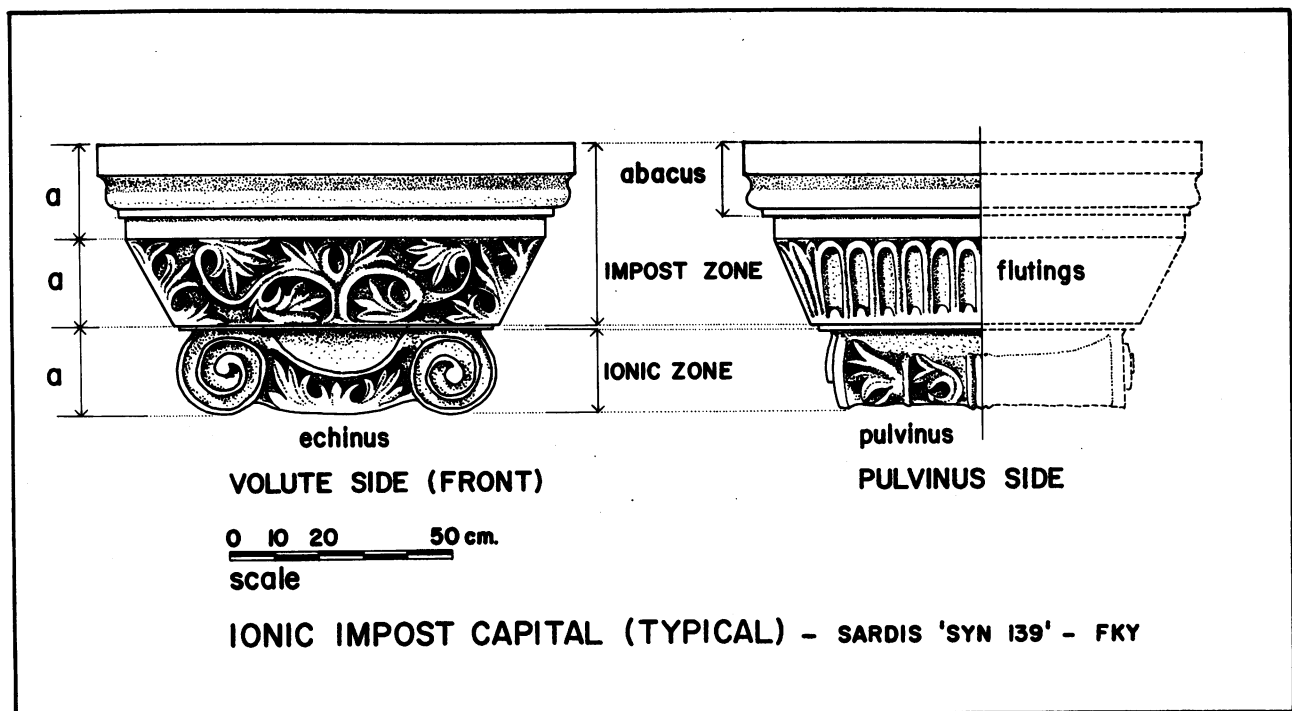
SYN 115 (fig. 12)

Almost half of the capital, including one full volute side, is missing. The bottom disc projects 1.0–1/5 cm.; a dowel hole is at the center of the disc, 3.5 by 4.0 cm. and 7.0 cm. deep.

The overall decorative and architectural composition is the same as the previous one, Syn 139. The Ionic zone of the preserved half, the acanthus decoration of the echinus, and the abacus profiling are identical. The impost decoration, however, is somewhat different. Instead of one central plant, the middle



3. Palaestra, Southeast Corner, Colonnade Elements as excavated, looking West



4. Design of Typical Ionic Impost Capital

Sardis



5. PA/W 71.09



6. PA/S 71.10, Volute Side



7. SYN 138, Southeast Corner Capital, Volute Side

Sardis, Bath-Gymnasium, Palaestra, Ionic Impost Capitals



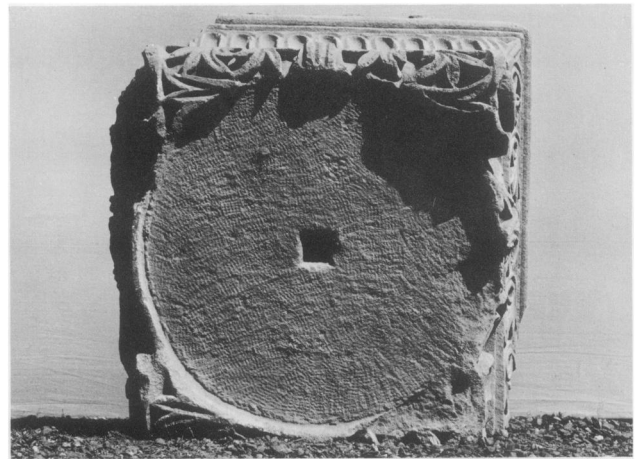
8. SYN 139, Volute Side



9. SYN 139, Pulvinus Side



10. PA/W 71.09, Volute Side



11. PA/W 71.09, Bottom View



12. SYN 115, Volute Side



13. PA/W 71.07, Southeast Corner Capital, Inner Corner



14. SYN 138, Corner Capital, as found



15. SYN 138, Corner Capital, Inner Corner

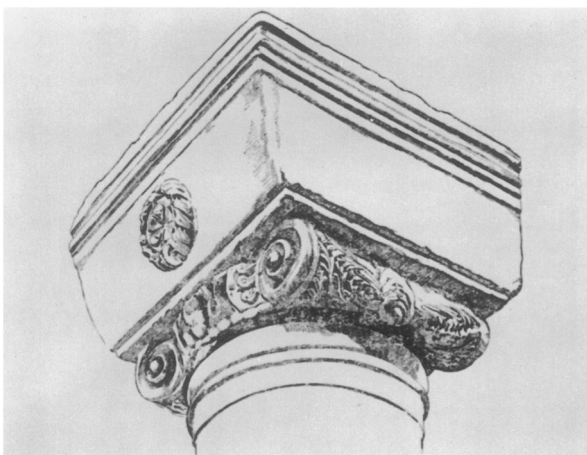
Sardis, Bath-Gymnasium, Palaestra, Ionic Impost Capitals



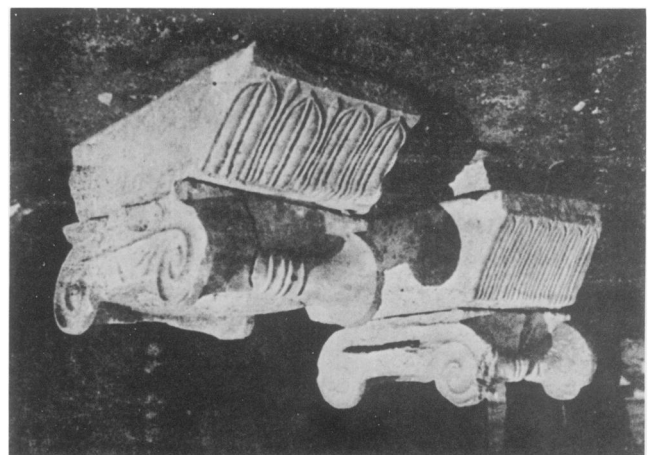
16. Greece, Skripu



17. Egypt, Alexandria Museum

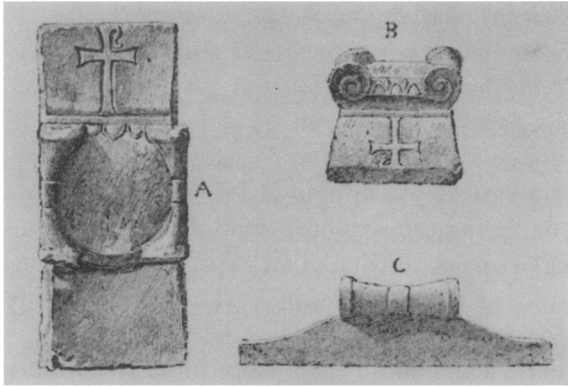


18. Greece, Chalkis, Hagia Paraskevi



19. Greece, Daphnousion (Arkitsa)

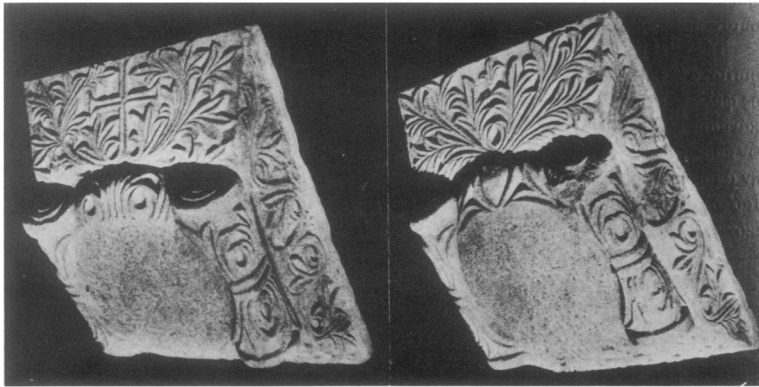
Ionic Impost Capitals



20. Greece, Delphi



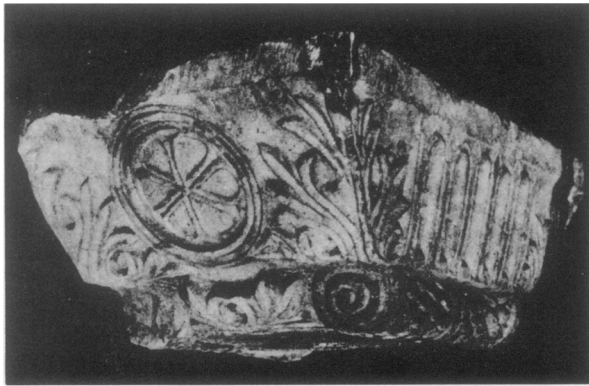
21. Istanbul, St. John of Studion



22. Greece, Nea Anchialos, Basilica A



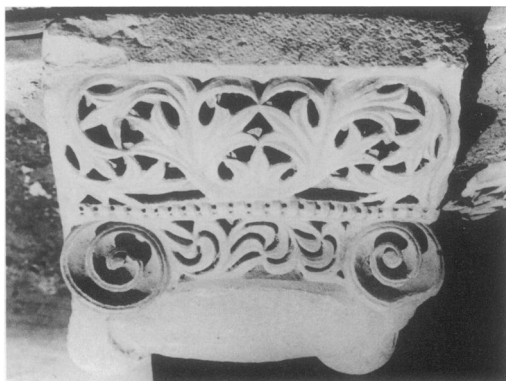
23. Greece, Corinth-Lechaion, St. Leonidas



24. Greece, Nea Anchialos, Basilica A



25. Istanbul, Taşkasap, First Capital



26. Yugoslavia, Stobi, Episcopal Basilica

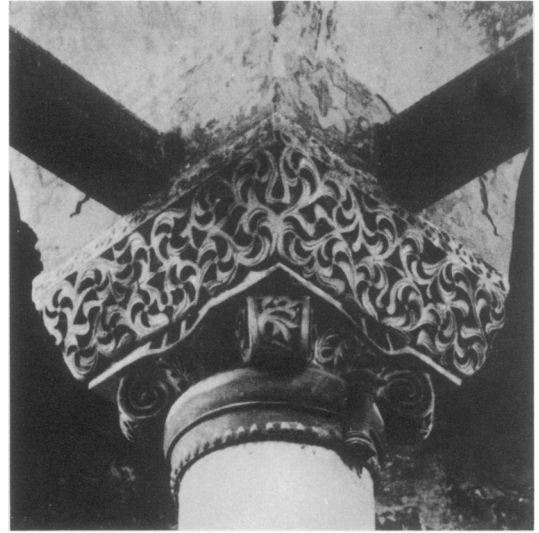


27. Istanbul, Taşkasap, Second Capital

Ionic Impost Capitals



28. Istanbul, Sts. Sergius and Bacchus



29. Istanbul, St. Sophia



30. Salonika, St. Demetrius



31. Istanbul, St. Irene

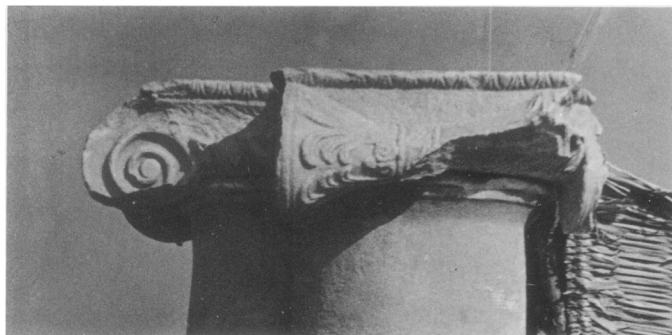
Ionic Impost Capitals



32. Turkey, Ephesus, St. John,
Ionic Impost Capital



33. Turkey, Kurşunlu (Bithynia),
Corinthian Pier Capital



34. Synagogue Forecourt, Ionic Corner Capital



34a. SYN 138, Inner Corner Detail



35. Marble Court, Second-storey Cornice



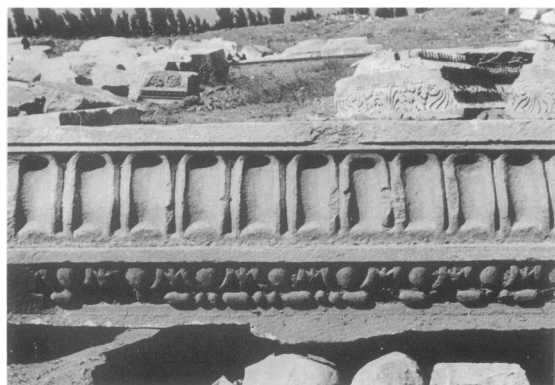
35a. SYN 138, Palmette Detail



36. Marble Court, Ionic Capital



36a. SYN 139, Detail of Volute Side



37. Palaestra Architrave



37a. PA/W 71.09, Detail of Fluting Ornament, Pulvinus Side

Sardis, Bath-Gymnasium Complex, Architectural Ornament

section of the impost is occupied by two identical acanthus plants that are made up of four lobes each. The corners are left unornamented without the elongated lily leaves. The double acanthus row of the pulvinus has leaflets turning inward, instead of the usual outward leaves, as on the capital described above.

SYN 138 Corner Capital (figs. 7, 14, 15)

The capital was found in three matching pieces. One of the volute sides has most of its echinus and about one-fifth of the impost missing. Unlike the other capitals, the bottom of this capital deviates from a perfect circle: the bottom outline of one of the echini cuts in too soon, reducing the radius of the circle at that point from 31 to 28 cm. Again, unlike the other capitals, the bottom disc is not raised over the pulvinus; instead, the disc is sunk at the corner volute for a depth of 2–3 cm.

The two inner (pulvinus) sides of the capital follow the same decorative pattern as the normal capitals with fluting decoration on the imposts and a double bank of acanthus leaflets spreading outward from the central triple-rope molding of the pulvinus. The outer (volute) sides display a new decorative motif: a row of "open and closed palmettes" in the classical mode. The echini have banks of simple acanthus leaflets, symmetrically arranged.

PA/W 71.07 Corner Capital (fig. 13)

Only a fragment of the impost zone of this capital is preserved: the piece is 0.71 m. long and *ca.* 0.30–0.40 m. wide. It shows twelve flutings (calculated to be complete) and is topped by an abacus (the fluting band is 0.19 m. high, flutes 0.055 m. wide and 0.018 m. deep). The adjacent side is preserved to a length of 0.20–0.24 m. displaying acanthus decoration and the beginning of an inner corner (the corner is indicated by a piece of acanthus leaf only 0.05 m. wide and the trace of a return on the upper fillet of the abacus). This special corner detail is the same as that of

Syn 138, the well-preserved capital of the southeastern palaestra corner and proves that fragment PA/W 71.07 is part of the southwest corner capital.

PA/W 71.09 (figs. 5, 10, 11)

The upper half of the impost of one side and the echinus of the opposite side of the capital are heavily damaged. Most of the abacus molding of one of the pulvinus sides is broken.

The circular bottom disc is sunk into the body of the capital for a depth of 2 cm. along the edge of the echinus and 3–4 cm. at the volute corners. The center has a square dowel hole, 4.5 cm. in width and 6.5 cm. in depth.

The preserved echinus displays a double-stemmed acanthus leaf of three lobes each. The pulvinus is divided in the middle only by a heavy three-rope band, each side being filled by double-stemmed acanthus leaves with pointed tips.

The impost is decorated with acanthus foliage on the volute side and a fluting row on the pulvinus. Unlike the other capitals, the acanthus pattern of the volute side is not organized around a central plant (Syn 139), or two symmetrical plants (Syn 115): a simple row of five acanthus leaves, of five lobes each, curl into their circling stems, their tips turning alternately upward and downward. The stems make broad S-curves, spreading from left to right like a wavy band of vine-scroll. Carving is rich, deeply undercut, and vigorous. The decorated area of the impost of this capital is much shallower than others (0.13 m. vs. 0.20–0.24 m., with the exception of PA/S 71.10) which might partly account for the linear arrangement of the acanthus foliage.

PA/S 71.10 (fig. 6)

Less than half of this capital is preserved: the entire half of one of the volute sides and much of the Ionic zone of the preserved half is missing. The scanty remaining Ionic zone is represented by the upper half of the volute and part of the central "lip" above the echinus.

The acanthus decoration of the volute side is composed of a central plant growing upward and branching to the sides in two groups, making S-curve tendrils. The arrangement of acanthus foliage is similar to capital Syn 139, but simpler and somewhat compressed on account of restricted space (height of decorated band: 0.14 m.).

The fluting decoration of the pulvinus side and the abacus profiling display the characteristics of the previous examples although the abacus here is disproportionately heavy in regard to the generally lighter dimensions of the capital (abacus: 0.17 m.).

DIMENSIONS (in centimeters)	SYN 139	SYN 115	PA/W 71.09	PA/S 71.10	SYN 138
Total Height	60	64	43	48-50?	52
Height of Ionic Zone	20	19	16	15-17?	16
Height of Impost Zone	40	45	27	33	36
Height of Abacus	15	16	12	16	12
Bottom Diameter	61	60	60	not preser.	61
Top Dimensions	94 × 94	88 × ?	86 × 88	87 × ?	—
Width of Impost Bottom (volute)	70	70	68	69	83 & 87
Width of Impost Bottom (pulvinus)	78	not preser.	70	not preser.	60
Width of Impost Top (volute) – exc. abacus	84	79	79	76	100 & 105
Width of Impost Top (pulvinus) – exc. abacus	88	not preser.	not preser.	not preser.	72
Width of Impost Top (volute) – inc. abacus	—	—	—	—	78
Width of Impost Top (pulvinus) – inc. abacus	—	—	—	—	109 & 111
Impost Projection – exc. abacus	11	9	14	8	9
Impost Projection – inc. abacus	16	14	18	12	14
Center to Center Distance of Volutes	49	51	49	not preser.	60
Diameter of Volutes	20	20	19	18	20
Height of Flutes	18	22	11	13	16
Width of Flutes	6	6	6	6	6
Depth of Flutes	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.5	1.6
Findspots	N24/E104	N23/E107	N32/E39	N33/E93	N23/E110

Comparative Dimensions of Ionic Impost Capitals from Sardis